

## WAR AND THE HUMAN PSYCHE

A Review Essay by

IAN ROXBOROUGH

### *On Killing: the Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*

By Dave Grossman

Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

366 pp. \$14.95  
[ISBN: 0-316-33011-6]

### *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century*

by Ben Shephard

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

487 pp. \$27.95  
[ISBN: 0-674-00592-9]

### *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare*

by Joanna Bourke

New York: Basic Books, 1999.

509 pp. \$30.00  
[ISBN: 0-465-00737-6]

War is a realm of exhaustion, horror, and at times madness. The three books reviewed here attempt to come to grips with what might be called the psychic dimension of combat: why men kill and what happens to their minds in the process.

*On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* begins with the well-established belief that “man is not by nature a killer.” The author, Dave Grossman, quotes the claim by S.L.A. Marshall that fewer than 20 percent of the soldiers who fought in World War II shot at the enemy. Some fired consistently, but others failed to either aim their weapons or pull the trigger, demonstrating a human inhibition against killing.

These findings by Marshall, though subject to dispute, were taken to heart. Since the war, Western militaries have undertaken a training revolution consisting largely of techniques to enable greater numbers of soldiers to fight more effectively. When people become angry or

Gettysburg, July 1863.



War Department (Timothy O'Sullivan)

frightened, they stop thinking with their forebrains—which distinguishes them from animals—and start to rely on their midbrains. “They are literally scared out of their wits.” Using pop-up targets and other training devices, Western armies conditioned soldiers to shoot reflexively. By the Vietnam War, the percentage of combat troops who fired their weapons had risen to 95 percent. In this way, using modern psychology techniques, the reluctance to kill had been reduced.

Reducing nonshooters has not taken the terror and stress from the battlefield. In American wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the chance of becoming a psychiatric casualty was greater than being killed by enemy fire. The sustained tempo of military operations gives the stressed soldier little respite. Grossman concludes that “our physical and logistical capability to sustain combat has completely outstripped our psychological capacity to endure it.” The result is that combat can literally cause madness in the ranks. “Fear, combined with exhaustion, hate, horror, and the irreconcilable task of balancing these with the need to kill, eventually drives the soldier so deep into a mire of guilt and horror that he tips over the brink into that region that we call insanity.”

Ben Shephard examines those who study and treat the mind in *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century*. It is a history of the diagnosis and care of the traumas associated with battle. The author recounts the story of psychiatry as it became an

accepted scientific discipline. He details the divisions between soldiers and psychiatrists over treating mental disorders brought about by combat.

The military was forced to deal with mental problems to stem the loss of fighting men while civilian authorities were concerned with reducing the cost of psychiatric disabilities, which indeed were immense. In the battle of the Somme in 1916, as many as 40 percent of the casualties were caused by shell shock. At the end of the war, 11,600 British servicemen were committed to mental asylums. Some 40,000 Britons were receiving pensions for war-related mental disorders as late as 1939. The United States spent almost a billion dollars on the psychiatric illness of veterans in the interwar years. The pressure to understand madness in war and develop treatments was enormous. Both psychologists and psychiatrists, with their military sponsors, gradually learnt more about the mind under the stress of battle. Eventually, instead of evacuating psychiatric cases to hospitals at home, methods of rapidly treating men and returning them to the front evolved, though not without controversy and experimentation. This has been effective. Today most soldiers are immediately treated in the combat zone and sent back to fight after a few days rest.

But the increased ability to kill comes with the cost of increased post-traumatic stress as combat veterans seek

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to deal with guilt. Researchers still know little about the long-term impact of killing and the reintegration of veterans into society. Moreover, the study of psychiatric casualties is bedeviled by inadequate and contradictory statistics. Estimates of the number of Vietnam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder range from half a million to three times that number—or between 18 and 54 percent of those who served.

*An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* by Joanna Bourke tackles many of the same issues, but in a different spirit and with a quite different approach. The author reacts to what she perceives as sanitizing and wants to “put killing back into military history,” stating that “the characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing.” In this regard, Bourke is at one with both Grossman and Shephard. But although the latter authors regard the act of killing as traumatic, Bourke argues that men get pleasure from taking life in war. Drawing on a wealth of published sources to support this contention, she believes that many or most servicemen were “intoxicated by ‘violence for its own sake’: fighting was fun.” The personalization of the enemy enabled them to kill. “It validated combatants as moral men.”

Bourke argues that soldiers make moral sense out of butchery through stories, which place them at the center of the narrative as willful, moral agents. To do this, they must adopt a positive attitude toward killing. To overcome the horror of war and retain a sense of themselves as moral beings, they come to glory in war. Eventually, soldiers derive pleasure from it.

This assertion may not seem plausible to many readers. Nor is the evidence that Bourke presents convincing. Regrettably, she is vague on the hypothesis she seeks to prove: is it that all men enjoy killing, that most men enjoy killing, or simply that some men enjoy killing? If her point is that under certain circumstances some men derive pleasure from killing, then she is right. (As Grossman reminds us, about 2 percent of the male population, when pushed or given a legitimate reason, will kill without remorse.) But if Bourke is claiming something more, her technique of rehearsing quotations from fictional and biographical accounts—without any attempt to determine whether they are representative—is simply not compelling. **JFQ**

## GREAT POWER STRUGGLES

A Book Review by

GEORGE C. HERRING

### The Tragedy of Great Power Politics

by John J. Mearsheimer

New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001.

576 pp. \$27.95

[ISBN: 0-393-02025-8]

The events of 9/11 jolted Americans out of the triumphalism, insularity, and complacency that marked the post-Cold War era like nothing else. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* by John Mearsheimer was written before those attacks but claims that the hopes of the 1990s were illusory anyway. The author, who teaches political science at the University of Chicago, rejects the idea that the end of the Cold War and rise of democratic capitalism led to the end of history, an era in which states would play a less critical role and conflict would disappear. An unabashed realist, he insists that nations will continue to compete and great power conflict will be the norm.

Mearsheimer depends on history to buttress a theory of offensive realism. Displaying a mastery of the historical literature, he analyzes the patterns and records of great power conflict over the last two centuries to explain the behavior of nations and their reasons for going to war. He concludes that the international system is basically anarchic and that states thus seek wealth and power to gain preeminence in their regions, the most certain way of advancing their security. Other nations, faced with a regional hegemon, will seek to balance that power and encourage other nations to do so by passing the buck or acquiescing.

War often results from the structure of the international system. It occurs when power is dispersed among states in unbalanced multipolarity. Conflict is least likely when bipolarity or a rough balance exists between two powers, as characterized by the Cold War.

Even in the nuclear age, armies remain critical means of expansion and vital instruments of national power, an argument that naval and airpower enthusiasts may well dispute. Moreover,

America has traditionally regarded itself as standing apart from Europe, and realists (including George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau) scorned idealism and utopianism. Yet Mearsheimer regards the Nation as an exemplar of offensive realism. The United States has sought regional hegemony since its was founded and is the only nation to achieve that elusive goal in modern times. Concerned over Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union as threats to the international order, America became an offshore balancer, intervening in conflicts in key strategic regions of the world.

Mearsheimer insists that the real world remains a realist world. The international system is anarchic, and power politics will continue to drive great powers. He predicts that new benign power structures in Europe and Northeast Asia cannot be sustained, and the result may be unbalanced multipolarity. According to *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, the foremost threat is Beijing. If its economy grows at the same rate as the last two decades, China could exceed Japan and rival the United States. It has the potential to become a regional hegemon and pose a greater threat than during the last century. The prescriptions that Mearsheimer offers for the future are keeping U.S. troops in Europe and Northeast Asia, and in particular responding to setbacks in the Chinese economy. Above all, the Nation must not abandon the realism that has served it so well over the course of its history.

Readers may find much to quarrel with here. By focusing on European great powers and the United States and Japan, Mearsheimer leaves out much of the world, including the regions of preeminent concern at the moment. Indeed, a work on great powers seems strangely out of place as those states seek to cooperate in waging war against terrorism across international boundaries. Moreover, he plays down to the point of exclusion the role of personality, ideology, and to some degree economics in international conflict. Some will challenge the simplistic claim that America intervened in 1917 to uphold the European balance of power. And liberals who dream of a better world will object to his deep pessimism and predictions.

*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* sets out a provocative thesis which is underpinned by powerful arguments. Written in a clear, forceful style, devoid of jargon and obscure language, it will be widely read and seriously debated. **JFQ**

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## THE CHIEFS AS POLICYMAKERS

A Book Review by

SAMUEL J. NEWLAND

### *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II*

by Mark A. Stoler

Chapel Hill, North Carolina:  
The University of North Carolina Press,  
2000.

379 pp. \$37.50

[ISBN: 0-8078-2557-3]

The last decade has been a busy period for military historians. Since the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II, there have been myriad publications on different aspects of the conflict. Some are scholarly works while others are memoirs by a dwindling generation of veterans. Within this new body of literature is an intriguing new book by Mark Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II*. A professor of history at the University of Vermont, the author offers an excellent read for students of history and national security affairs. The book is a significant analysis of the emergence of America as a global power and the entry of the Armed Forces into the realm of policymaking.

The thesis of *Allies and Adversaries* is that change in civil-military relations arose during World War II. Routine military involvement in policy was minimal prior to that conflict. Other than a brief foray into world politics at the end of World War I, the focus of the Armed Forces before 1939 was on defense of the homeland, overseas possessions, and the Western hemisphere. During and immediately after the war, however, the role of the military expanded dramatically. By the time the National Security Act of 1947 was passed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had entered the policymaking arena.

As World War II progressed, it became obvious that the conflict was global. Projecting power incurred substantial foreign policy implications. The scope of warfare involved the military in formulating international security policy.

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Combined Chiefs in Cairo, December 1943.



U.S. Army

According to Stoler, this had been an interest of the Armed Forces for a long time. Once America entered the war, two additional factors favored increased military participation. First, as Secretary of State, Cordell Hull maintained an artificial distinction between military and political affairs. Thus as the war progressed, the military had a primary role in policy development with diplomats in the background. Hull, the author claims, focused on postwar policy. Secondly, President Franklin Roosevelt relished running his own foreign policy, which also made the Department of State a secondary player.

Roosevelt was instrumental to the military entrance into the foreign policy arena because of his reliance on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Although it had no statutory charter or mandated roles, Stoler notes the close relationship between the President and these officers. This affiliation increased the influence of the Armed Forces on foreign policy. But the new power of the Joint Chiefs came at the expense of the Secretaries of War and the Navy, and particularly the Secretary of State.

This was a difficult period in terms of policy, not only for the Axis but also the Allies. There was friction with Britain over various issues, including Churchill's fixation on Greece as the route to the European heartland. The

greatest discord was with Moscow, which evolved from ally into adversary. Military planners increasingly worried about Soviet intentions in 1944, yet they felt it necessary to maintain good relations since the Soviets were needed first to help defeat Germany, then to aid in the downfall of Japan.

The Joint Chiefs concluded that conflict with the Soviet Union was inevitable. The role of the Red army in the occupation of Europe and the desire of the President to include the Kremlin in the postwar equation promoted cordial relations despite misgivings. Concerns were validated when the Soviets violated the Yalta agreement almost before the ink was dry.

By the end of the conflict the military was entrenched in foreign policy formulation. This role starkly contrasted to the pre-war years. The development of the Joint Chiefs during the war and its evolution into a politico-military entity is intriguing. Stoler helps explain how this came to pass. This excellent book is highly recommended.

**JFQ**

## SOLDIERS AS GOVERNORS

A Book Review by

AUDREY KURTH CRONIN

### Waltzing into the Cold War: The Struggle for Occupied Austria

by James Jay Carafano

College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2002.

288 pp. \$44.95

[ISBN: 1-58544-213-5]

While overshadowed by the more familiar account of postwar Germany, the occupation of Austria is a fascinating study in Cold War history, replete with Allied friction, civil disorder, clandestine operations, bureaucratic infighting, and political reversals. Of the works that have appeared on this subject in the intervening decades, few have had the access to the historical records cited in *Waltzing into the Cold War: The Struggle for Occupied Austria*.

The author, James Jay Carafano, has taught military history at West Point and served as executive editor of *Joint Force Quarterly*. His story of the U.S. military role in Austria fills out an understanding of what happened on the ground after World War II. Particularly engaging is the struggle of the Army to carry out an occupation for which it was ill prepared. This work is not only a contribution to the scholarship on postwar Austria and the origins of the Cold War, but a case study of post-conflict operations and civil-military relations.

The central argument of the book is that American policy in Austria was dominated by security concerns—often at the expense of broader interests—which reflected the strengths and weaknesses of a military woefully unprepared to win the peace. U.S. thinking was influenced by habits that were locked in a warfighting doctrine with little capacity to shift toward nuanced political concerns when hostilities ended. The militarized nature of policy led to mixed results: it complicated and prolonged the occupation but also gave added importance to a state in which America had historically held little interest, ensuring the economic and

diplomatic support that facilitated its postwar recovery.

American inflexibility drove occupation policy, according to Carafano. U.S. forces were preoccupied with warfighting long after the last shot was fired and neglected peacetime duties. They were concerned over disarming, demobilizing, and countering upheaval—without evaluating the political situation, coordinating with the Allies, and planning to address civilian needs. “Lack of experience, inadequate skills in interagency operations, unimaginative doctrine, poor training, and shallow professional education thoroughly exacerbated . . . limitations in men and equipment.” These problems unnecessarily complicated a return to civilian government and may in the longer run have delayed signing of the four-power Austrian State Treaty in 1955.

One unproductive habit of the Army was drawing black and white distinctions between friends and enemies. Although declared the first victim of the *Aunschluss* in 1945, Austria had been integral to the Nazi war machine. Occupation policy in the early postwar years reflected this ambiguity. U.S. forces alienated Austrians with clumsy nonfraternization rules and unfair requisitioning of housing from resistance members while Americans expected to be quartered and treated as liberators. Two years later the military shifted to a different view, influenced by the Soviet threat, even as declassified intelligence reports reflected no change in local events. With the Soviet Union as the enemy, the American military essentially recast every Austrian as a friend, naively ignoring signs of right-wing influence in the *gendarmerie*, which Washington was secretly arming. Indeed, with respect to postwar intelligence, Carafano pulls no punches:

*United States Forces Austria did not provide unbiased and critical analysis. Following the rhythm of habits, the command generated*

*intelligence based on the identified threat. In turn, [the American] reporting method justified concerns over Soviet intentions with a tendency to reinforce existing preconceptions.*

For the Army, peacetime was just another battlefield. And the lines had been drawn.

The strength of this book is a careful analysis of military policy toward Austria. There was a lack of national guidance, especially in the early days of occupation, which was reflected on the ground. Thus Carafano argues that policy emanated from below rather than from above. Indeed, he emphasizes the influence of U.S. high commissioners, in particular General Geoffrey Keyes, who had virtually unlimited freedom of action because attention at home was directed toward Germany. Commissioners and their staffs wielded tremendous influence, transforming Austria into a front-line state. It must be noted, however, that these observations may not be entirely fair since they reflect a detailed study of the U.S. military, not the twists and turns of Soviet policy. Final judgment on the claim that the Army was an important factor in militarizing the Cold War must await detailed examination of the other major players.

Carafano is a good storyteller, making the characters and the events of postwar Austria as engrossing as a novel. It is well worth picking up his book for its description of the Army at a critical point in its history. *Waltzing into the Cold War* is not limited to technical problems in one quarter of Europe but treats larger themes: civil-military relations, occupation government, humanitarian relief, et al. There is much that resonates with recent operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. But, as the author observes, “The most powerful force of habit shaping the U.S. effort was a tradition of forgetting.” One can hope that policymakers who read this book avoid perpetuating that tradition. **JFQ**

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Audrey Kurth Cronin is the author of *Great Power Politics and the Struggle over Austria, 1945-1955*.

U.S. Air Force (Efrain Gonzalez)



U.S. Navy (David C. Mercil)



U.S. Marine Corps

# *what they've said in JFQ . . .*

***it is hard to think of a nonmilitary role without precedent for such roles are as American as apple pie***  
—Samuel P. Huntington

***the mission and the Rwandans fell victim to inflated expectations that the United Nations could not fulfill***  
—R.A. Dallaire and B. Poulin

***Roosevelt knew that generals could make disastrous military mistakes, not merely political ones***  
—Eliot A. Cohen

***evolutionary innovation depends on organizational focus over time rather than guidance by one individual***  
—Williamson Murray

***to achieve more efficient use of defense resources, Congress looked to the Chairman***  
—James R. Locher III

***advanced courses on proliferation and counterproliferation reach only a small fraction of students***  
—Robert G. Joseph

***military power can sometimes be brought to bear when it is applied without first defeating defending enemy forces***  
—Carl H. Builder

***the system of systems is intelligible and applicable to an enemy through its component parts***  
—James Stavridis

***lack of detailed intelligence on Grenadian defenses compelled planners to opt for a sudden attack with overwhelming force***  
—Ronald H. Cole



55th Signal Company (Cory Montgomery)



786th Communications Squadron (Edward D Holzapfel)



1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jim Varhegyi)

*the higher careerists rise, the more they see their role as protectors of service traditions, doctrine, and loyalties*  
—William A. Owens

*to tackle the fog and friction of war is not akin to exploring unknown terrain*  
—Colin S. Gray

*despite the recognition that graduated pressure was fatally flawed, the Joint Chiefs were unable to articulate their objections or alternatives*  
—H.R. McMaster

*interdependent maneuver calls for a fully joint approach, generating synergy between fire and movement*  
—Antulio J. Echevarria II

*with micronavigation components, many dumb munitions could be transformed into PGM-like weapons*  
—Shannon L. Callahan

*history suggests that the denial of military experience increases the long-term suffering inherent in combat*  
—Barry R. McCaffrey

*if there ever was a function worthy of civilianization and privatization, civil affairs is it*  
—Charles J. Dunlap, Jr.

*gradualism may be here to stay if U.S. leaders opt to fight more wars for amorphous interests with a disparate set of allies*  
—Benjamin S. Lambeth

*an active, sustained partnership between the public and private sectors will be essential in the case of bio-defense*  
—Michèle A. Flournoy

*. . . a reprise in the next issue*